DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 240 JC 830 250

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TITLE Educational and Occupational Orientations of Young Hispanic Women in the Brownsville, Texas, Area.
PUB DATE [May 83]
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Statistical Data (110)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Aspiration; Career Education, Expectation; *Females; High Schools; *High School Seniors; *Hispanic Americans; *Occupational Aspiration; Parent Participation; School Counseling; School Surveys; Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Texas (Brownsville)

ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in Brownsville, Texas, to identify the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of Hispanic females and to determine whether these expectations and aspirations differed from those of the dominant culture. Survey instruments were distributed to all senior females (N=853) in local high schools, requesting information on personal characteristics, family background, occupational and educational goals and perceived influences on attainment of these goals. Study findings, based on an 85% response rate, included the following: (1) 87% of the respondents were of Hispanic origin; (2) 70% expected to enter relatively high-status occupations, with the most frequently cited careers in the teaching and protective services areas; (3) the majority of the respondents were aware that factors such as finances and job scarcity could affect their opportunity to get a job; (4) 60% aspired and expected to obtain some type of postsecondary education; and (5) the survey results confirmed that Hispanic females were success oriented. Based on the findings, it was recommended that career education programs be designed to fit students' needs; that parents be increasingly involved with youth in determining their career lines and educational needs; and that educational and government policy makers reassess their operating assumptions about what Hispanic women need and want. A review of the literature concerning the status projections of Hispanic youth is included. (LL)

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# EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ORIENTATIONS OF YOUNG HISPANIC WOMEN IN THE BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS, AREA

Dr. Jaime Chahin

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore, in a limited way, the widely held belief that Hispanic females are different from the dominant culture in relation to educational and occupational aspirations. The educational and occupational attainment of Hispanics is a problem whose magnitude needs to be explored in order to inform educators and social policy makers of the changing needs of this population.

In the United States, education has been used as a stepping stone to more desirable occupations, higher income and acceptance by society. Yet, the role that Hispanic females have played in this endeavor has been very minimal. In March, 1975, the median income for an Hispanic female was $2,682 and $6,154 for males. Furthermore, one-third of the Hispanic men and three-fourths of the Hispanic women had an income of less than $5,000. Thus, it is obvious that the majority of the Hispanics were working in the lower paying occupations.

The aforementioned statistics are just as acute in the Rio Grande Valley and, in many cases, worse. The educational attainment of persons twenty-five (25) years and older is 5.8% for Hispanics. According to the Texas Employment Commission report of 1980, 50% of the families in the Rio Grande Valley are in the poverty level, and the Hispanics represent 90% of the poverty stricken citizenry. Furthermore, according

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to the Federal Register (June 2, 1977), the majority of the high schools in the Valley have high concentrations of students from low income families.

Pertinent Literature

A review of the pertinent literature reveals that there is a very limited research indicating status projections of Hispanic youth. Some of the relevant studies include Arturo de Hoyos, Irene Guerra, Rumaldo Juarez, Moises Venegas and Jaime Chahin. All of the data for these studies was collected along the Rio Grande, from Brownsville to El Paso, except the de Hoyos study which was conducted in Lansing, Michigan.

In 1959, Irene Guerra found that, regardless of socio-economic status, Hispanic youth in Laredo, Texas, had high educational and occupational aspirations. She also found that parents of these youth had similar goals for their children.

In 1961, Arturo de Hoyos conducted a study in Lansing, Michigan, of Hispanic youth. His data indicated that 50% of the Hispanic youth participating in the study wanted to attend an institution of higher education.

Rumaldo Juarez, in 1968, conducted a study in the Rio Grande Valley and found that, regardless of sex or socio-economic status, Hispanic youth desired and expected to obtain high level professional occupations.

In 1973, Venegas conducted a study of El Paso high school students and analyzed his data in terms of ethnicity, sex, grade level and type of school program in which they enrolled. His findings indicated that students in all groups, regardless of ethnicity, sex, grade level or school programs, had high aspirations and expectations for education and occupation.

In 1977, Jaime Chahin conducted a study in Eagle Pass, Texas, and analyzed his data in terms of ethnicity, sex, migrant status and type of school programs in which they enrolled. The findings indicated that, regardless of sex or socio-economic status, Hispanic youth have high educational and occupational aspirations.

Even though the research pertinent to the status aspirations and expectation of Hispanics is limited, the findings suggest a trend of upward mobility projections. Also, the findings clearly convey that Hispanic youth want the same high levels of achieved status as do other groups of American young people. They are interested in college technical training, prestige jobs, employment security, plus all other opportunities that are available in our society.

The limited literature, however, has specifically addressed the career and occupational orientations of Hispanic women. Thus, it is imperative that we investigate Robert Merton's "success ethnic" that has been inculcated by most youth of all social classes and, as a consequence, they maintain high level success goals, i.e., occupational and educational aspirations. Merton further maintains that having high aspirations is not unique to one group in society, but is a universal pattern that cuts across class and ethnic distinctions.

Description of Sample Population

In order to adequately identify the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of Hispanic females, a survey of all senior females was conducted in all of the local high schools in Brownsville, Texas. A total of 853 surveys were disseminated and 727 (85%) were

completed. Of the total number of respondents, 87% were of Hispanic origin (Table III). The majority of the respondents (79%) were between the ages of seventeen (17) and eighteen (18)(Table I).

Sixty-five per cent (65%) of the respondents in the sample indicated they were in a college preparatory curriculum (Table XIV). The remaining balance were enrolled in vocational or other programs.

Family socio-economic status was determined on the basis of the present occupation of the family's major money earner. As expected, over 50% of the respondents were in predominately low socio-economic levels (Table XXIV).

Respondents were also asked, "Have you ever migrated to perform farm work?" Less than half of the respondents (38%) indicated they were involved at one time or other in performing migrant work (Table XXVI).

The survey instrument is a questionnaire that provides fixed-choice stimulus questions to elicit responses which indicate educational and occupational aspirations and expectations. Aspirations have been defined as desires of the individual; expectations have been defined as the levels that the respondent really expects to attain. When differences exist, this is referred to as anticipatory goal deflection.

The occupational aspirations and expectations questions are open-ended and then coded according to a modified census classification of occupations which represents a hierarchy of occupations based upon prestige and income. This was done to facilitate a uniform grouping of occupations listed by the respondent's inventories.

The categories used were:

| Occupational Levels | Type |
|---|---|
| High | 1. High Professional (doctor. lawyer, scientist, architect) |
| | 2. Low Professional (teacher, registered nurse) |
| | 3. Glamour (professional ball, pcp singer) |
| | 4. Managerial (executive management) |
| | 5. Draftsman |
| | 6. Farmer (own a ranch) |
| Intermediate | 7. Skilled Worker (carpenter, foreman, auto mechanic) |
| | 8. Clerical and sales (typist, secretary, salesman) |
| Low | 9. Operative (bus driver, machine operator) |
| | 10. Laborer and unskilled worker (waitress, farm worker) |
| | 11. Housewife |

In terms of occupational aspirations, over 70% of the respondents (Table IV) expected to attain relatively high status occupations. The teaching profession and protective services reflected the highest number of responses. Furthermore, over 80% of the respondents (Table V) were very certain of their career choices. It should be pointed out that teachers and protective services personnel are influential role models in the everyday activities of students and families.

The majority of the respondents are aware of the factors that can affect the opportunity to get a job. Over 50% of the respondents identified money as having some effect on their job opportunities. On the other hand, over 50% of the respondents have the support of their

parents and are willing to relocate for employment. Over 50% of the respondents identified the scarcity of jobs and lack of opportunities as the primary obstacles in getting a job (Table VI).

Over 70% of the respondents were found to consider steady employment, money, opportunity to help others, independence and leadership as important things that need to be considered in picking a job (Table VII). Furthermore, education and getting a job were designated by the respondents as important life goals (Table VIII). Their orientation reflects an awareness of the need for education and steady employment.

Analysis of educational aspirations and expectations indicated that over 60% of the respondents aspire and expect to achieve some type of post-secondary education (Tables IX, X). Two-year and four-year institutions were clearly identified in their educational goals. Perhaps one explanation is that the respondents are aware of the institution in their community: Texas Southmost College and Pan American University. Thus, respondents' aspirations and expectations are very congruent. Over 80% of the respondents are very certain of their Educational Expectations (Table XI).

It is interesting to note that the respondents ranked their parents and personal job experience as the most helpful in deciding for a job. This is very interesting because the majority of the parents have a low level of education, yet have very much influence on their daughters. Teachers and counselors were also ranked high (Table XII). Job experience was considered important, yet there are limited opportunities available for students in this area.

The schools should continuously assess their relationship with parents and the business community in order to maintain close communication lines.

Over 80% of the respondents are considering attending college. (Table XVII). The respondents also indicated that they plan to finance their education by working and with assistance from their parents (Table XVIII). As much information as possible concerning financial aid should be provided to students, so that they can become aware of the different financial aid programs available for post-secondary education.

As far as family characteristics, over 70% of the respondents came from families of four or more children (Table XX). Over 50% of the parents were employed either full time or part time. A high incidence of unemployment perhaps reflects their lack of formal training and skills (Table XXIII). Sixty-two per cent (62%) of the households were bilingual with English and Spanish spoken at home (Table XXI). Furthermore, over 50% of the parents have less than a high school education which is reflected on the occupations of the main bread winners.

Over 30% of the respondents are interested in attending a two-year junior college or technical school; others are interested in state universities and private colleges (Table XV). Over 50% of the respondents are interested in commuting on a daily basis to college (Table VXI). The majority of the respondents are not interested in joining the military.

The survey has confirmated that Hispanic females are success oriented. Moreover, the majority of the respondents indicated that their parents were the most influential people in helping to determine their

occupation. Although this survey does no provide the necessary data to substantiate exactly how their parents feel about their children, there is reason to believe that they would positively endorse the high goals of their children. Even though some parents will be able to provide financial support to their children, the extent to which youth with parents from low socio-economic levels can receive support from their parents is highly questionable. First, the majority of the occupations of the heads of household are in unskilled labor, which does not generate enough family financial resources. Furthermore, more than 50% of the families in the sample came from families composed of five or more children. Secondly, very few of the parents have any high school or college education experience, thus, they are not familiar with the new expenses their children will encounter in higher education. Therefore, parents are at a disadvantage in helping to prepare their children for post-secondary education. Thus, if there are students who do not reach their goals, it is not necessarily because they lack motivation and desire, but it may be due to the lack of opportunities, finances and educational institutions that do not provide for their needs.

Recommendations

Quite explicitly, this survey further substantiates the fact that regardless of sex, Hispanics have high educational and occupational orientations. Furthermore, Hispanic females are strongly committed to their goals; however, the realization of the orientations of the youth will be highly influenced by the educational and vocational resources that are made available to them.

First, it is imperative that schools design career education programs that adhere to the needs of the students. Career education programs in high school should be part of the curriculum throughout the Hispanic female's high school education. This will provide the student with a better understanding of what is expected of workers, what occupations exist, and what educational and occupational paths lead to a particular career goal. This will also allow individual students to discover their interest, attitudes and values toward certain careers.

Counselors should continuously provide information concerning post-secondary education, since respondents do not seem to be aware of all the financial aid resources available for them. Even though a high percentage of the respondents indicated that they were enrolled in the college preparatory curriculum, counselors should continuously review their course loads to ascertain that they are indeed enrolled in college preparatory courses and not just meeting the minimum requirements. It is imperative that counselors explore all the possible alternatives before determining the program that adequately serves the needs of the individual. High school counselors should work very closely with colleges in order to have access to information concerning financial aid, admissions, programs, etc.

Furthermore, there is a dire need to get parents involved with youth in thinking through life plans, career lines and educational needs. Considering the low level of education of the parents, a parental involvement program should be designed so that parents themselves can be informed and educated in an on-going basis and thus be able to help their daughters more. In undertaking the aforementioned role, parents will support the

school system's goals while working constructively to improve the development of the school programs.

Educational and governmental policy makers concerned with the educational plight of Hispanic women should carefully check their operating assumptions about what Hispanic females want or need. A continuous evaluation of present programs and assessments of forthcoming needs should be conducted at the local, state and federal level. This would provide legislators and policy makers with a more realistic appraisal of needs which, in turn, will create a more effective procedure for the development of programs and the appropriation of funds. In this manner, existing resources can be used to develop more adequate programs that will better equalize the educational opportunities of Hispanic women in isolated communities in the Southwest.

The cooperative efforts of school administrators, parents, program planners and legislators will be needed in order to meet the educational plight of Hispanic females. It is evident that Hispanic females have the desire and the motivation for high educational and occupational attainment, but it is up to society and its educational institutions to promote opportunities and learning experiences that will help fulfill those desires.

DESCRIPTIVE TABLES

TABLE I

Age of Respondents

| Age | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 13 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 | 1 | 0 |
| 15 | 4 | 1 |
| 16 | 150 | 20 |
| 17 | 371 | 51 |
| 18 | 160 | 22 |
| 19 | 35 | 5 |
| 20 | 6 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE II

Marriage Aspirations

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 718 | 99 |
| No | 7 | 1 |
| Already Married | 2 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE III

Ethnicity of Respondents

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Hispanic | 630 | 87 |
| White | 95 | 13 |
| Black | 1 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE IV

Number of Respondents Classified into Actual Categories for Occupational Aspirations

| Occupational Categories | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Skilled Worker | 25 | 3 |
| Military | 0 | 0 |
| Management | 40 | 6 |
| Farmer | 2 | 1 |
| Salesman | 60 | 8 |
| Clerical | 60 | 8 |
| Protective Services | 165 | 23 |
| Physician | 80 | 11 |
| Teacher | 220 | 30 |
| Draftsman | 16 | 2 |
| Glamour | 59 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE V

How Certain are Respondents Concerning the Job They Want to Have

| Response | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Very Certain | 200 | 28 |
| Certain | 224 | 31 |
| Not Very Certain | 212 | 29 |
| Uncertain | 75 | 10 |
| Very Certain | 16 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE VI

Things That Will Affect Respondents from Getting Jobs

| | Very Much | | Much | | Some | | Not at All | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Not Enough Money | 47 | 7 | 108 | 16 | 310 | 16 | 210 | 31 |
| Lack of Parents Interest | 68 | 10 | 57 | 8 | 100 | 15 | 449 | 67 |
| Don't Want to Move | 54 | 8 | 73 | 11 | 174 | 26 | 365 | 55 |
| Scarce Jobs | 78 | 12 | 132 | 20 | 257 | 39 | 198 | 30 |
| Lack of Opportunities | 102 | 14 | 154 | 22 | 243 | 35 | 200 | 29 |
| No Technical School or College | 43 | 6 | 51 | 8 | 165 | 25 | 401 | 61 |
| Not Smart Enough | 23 | 3 | 57 | 9 | 251 | 37 | 340 | 51 |

TABLE VII

Importance of the Following Things

In Picking a Job

| | Very Important | | Important | | Not Very Important | | Not at all Important | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Opportunity to Make Money | 78 | 17 | 258 | 57 | 93 | 20 | 28 | 6 |
| Chance to Help Other People | 357 | 50 | 278 | 38 | 72 | 10 | 13 | 2 |
| Chance to Become an Important Person | 250 | 35 | 261 | 37 | 156 | 22 | 44 | 6 |
| Steady Employment | 336 | 48 | 251 | 35 | 71 | 10 | 48 | 7 |
| Opportunity to be Your Own Boss | 279 | 40 | 214 | 31 | 160 | 23 | 41 | 6 |
| Chance for Excitement | 265 | 39 | 237 | 35 | 132 | 19 | 51 | 7 |

TABLE VIII

Valuation of Life Ends

| Responses | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Free Time | 80 | 8 |
| Develop Mind | 248 | 26 |
| Earn Money | 124 | 13 |
| Getting a Job | 227 | 23 |
| Living in Best Place | 95 | 10 |
| Material Things | 97 | 10 |
| Marriage and Family | 99 | 10 |

TABLE IX

Educational Aspirations

| Responses | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Quit School | 2 | 0 |
| Complete High School | 83 | 11 |
| Graduate Technical or Terminal Program | 71 | 10 |
| Graduate Junior College | 61 | 8 |
| Graduate from University | 321 | 44 |
| Additional Studies | 199 | 27 |

TABLE X

Educational Expectations

| Responses | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Quit School | 0 | |
| Complete High School | 56 | 8 |
| Graduate Terminal or Technical Program | 44 | 6 |
| Graduate Junior College | 158 | 22 |
| Graduate University | 285 | 39 |
| Additional Studies | 184 | 25 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XI

Certainty of Educational Expectations

| Responses | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Very Certain | 260 | 36 |
| Certain | 330 | 45 |
| Not Very Certain | 121 | 17 |
| Uncertain | 10 | 1 |
| Very Uncertain | 6 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XII

How Helpful Have Each of the Following People and Things been in Deciding on a Job

| | (Number of Frequencies) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source of Help | No Help | | Little Help | | Some Help | | Very Helpful | |
| Parents | 4 | 1% | 10 | 1% | 40 | 6% | 673 | 92% |
| Friends | 300 | 41% | 200 | 28% | 122 | 17% | 105 | 14% |
| Counselor | 100 | 12% | 227 | 28% | 150 | 18% | 350 | 42% |
| Teacher | 69 | 9% | 120 | 17% | 210 | 29% | 328 | 45% |
| Relatives | 229 | 30% | 100 | 14% | 160 | 22% | 250 | 34% |
| Media | 250 | 34% | 167 | 23% | 130 | 18% | 180 | 25% |
| Occupational Handbooks | 122 | 17% | 155 | 21% | 200 | 28% | 250 | 34% |
| Personal Job Experience | 101 | 12% | 176 | 21% | 150 | 18% | 400 | 49% |

TABLE XIII

Military Interest

| Classification | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 50 | 7 |
| Not Sure | 98 | 13 |
| No | 579 | 80 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XIV

Distribution of Respondents in School Programs

| School Program | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| College Preparatory | 471 | 65 |
| Vocational | 202 | 28 |
| Other | 54 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XV

Type of College They Would Attend

| Type of College | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Technical Vocational School | 134 | 18 |
| Community/Junior College | 151 | 21 |
| Small Private College | 68 | 9 |
| A Large Private University | 50 | 7 |
| A Small State University | 186 | 26 |
| A Large State University | 138 | 19 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XVI

Where They Would Attend College

| Location | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| As Close to Home as Possible | 226 | 32 |
| Within Daily Traveling Distance | 299 | 41 |
| Somewhere Else in Texas | 155 | 21 |
| Out-of-State | 47 | 6 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XVII

College Attendance

| Attend | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Full Time | 208 | 29 |
| Part Time | 392 | 54 |
| Once In A While | 40 | 5 |
| Don't Know | 87 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XVIII

Financing of College Education

| How Financed | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Working While in School | 257 | 35 |
| Summer Job | 160 | 22 |
| Parents Assistance | 205 | 28 |
| Loan | 86 | 12 |
| Scholarship | 10 | 1 |
| Already Have Money | 2 | 1 |
| Other | 7 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XIX

Siblings Location in Family

| Sibling of Respondents | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Youngest Child | 161 | 22 |
| Oldest Child | 191 | 26 |
| Neither Youngest nor Oldest | 353 | 49 |
| Only Child | 22 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XX

Number of Children in Family

| Number of Children | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 27 | 4 |
| 2 | 78 | 11 |
| 3 | 111 | 14 |
| 4 | 142 | 20 |
| 5 | 103 | 14 |
| 6 | 266 | 37 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XXI

Language Spoken at Home

| Language Spoken | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| None | 10 | 1 |
| English and Spanish | 451 | 62 |
| Only Spanish | 215 | 30 |
| Only English | 51 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XXII

Higher Education Achieved by Parents

| | Father | | Mother | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| None | 39 | 5 | 40 | 6 |
| Grade 1-7 | 271 | 37 | 259 | 36 |
| Eighth Grade | 36 | 5 | 47 | 6 |
| Some High School | 91 | 13 | 98 | 13 |
| High School Graduate | 88 | 12 | 105 | 15 |
| Vocational School | 5 | 1 | 29 | 4 |
| Some College | 51 | 7 | 52 | 7 |
| College Graduate | 118 | 16 | 80 | 11 |
| Don't Know | 28 | 4 | 17 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XXIII

Employment of Parents

| Employed | Father N | % | Mother N | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes-Full Time | 372 | 51 | 250 | 34 |
| Yes-Part Time | 120 | 17 | 145 | 20 |
| Unemployed | 150 | 20 | 245 | 34 |
| Don't Know | 85 | 12 | 87 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XXIV

Main Bread Winner Jobs

| Job | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Physician | 4 | 1 |
| Teacher | 30 | 4 |
| Farmer | 10 | 1 |
| Management | 23 | 3 |
| Draftsman | 5 | 1 |
| Skilled | 135 | 19 |
| Operative | 45 | 6 |
| Salesman | 50 | 7 |
| Clerical | 60 | 8 |
| Social Work | 15 | 2 |
| Farm Labor | 200 | 27 |
| Unemployed | 150 | 21 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XXV

Major Money Earner

| Responses | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Father | 300 | 41 |
| Mother | 225 | 31 |
| Brother or Sister | 125 | 17 |
| Other | 77 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 727 | 100 |

TABLE XXVI

Migrant Status

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Does Not Apply | 359 | 49 |
| Never Migrated | 98 | 13 |
| Used to Migrate | 85 | 12 |
| Yes-Migrates | 185 | 26 |

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JUL 8 1983